

THE UNSTOPPABLE AEGINRST-MACHINE

DARRYL FRANCIS

Sutton, Surrey, England

The unstoppable AEGINRST machine grinds on, creating new transposals of those eight letters, allowing delighted logologists to add a few more notches to the AEGINRST holster!

Back in 1976, **Word Ways** published the most comprehensive list of AEGINRST transposals ever to see the light of day: Dmitri Borgmann's list of 131 specimens. In 1979, 1981, 1988 and 1989, **Word Ways** published various additional transposals.

I can now report the discovery of a new AEGINRST transposal -- new, yet not so new! The word is TASERING. This is the present participle of the verb 'Taser' (also spelled 'taser'), to immobilise or stun with a Taser, a small gunlike device which fires electrified darts or barbs, used to immobilise or stun. I came across the word in The Chambers Dictionary, the latest edition of a single-volume dictionary from Chambers, succeeding the earlier Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary and Chambers English Dictionary, published in Great Britain in August 1993.

I was pleased to think that I'd spotted a new AEGINRST transposal so soon after its appearance (or, at least the appearance of the infinitive form of the verb) in a dictionary. However, I decided to check other dictionaries, just to see if they had anything to say about TASER or TASERING.

I was astonished to find that The Second Barnhart Dictionary of New English (Barnhart, Steinmetz and Barnhart, published in 1980) included TASER, as both a noun and a verb! Hence, the existence of TASERING could have been validated as early as 1980. Even more surprising, I did a review of this dictionary for the November 1981 **Word Ways** (entitled "Neologisms Revisited"), in which I referred then to the word TASER as "an additional transposal of the prolific AERST group." I must have been asleep not to have noticed then that TASERING was a further AEGINRST transposal! My only defence is that no one else has pointed out the word's existence over the last thirteen years.

On checking the Oxford English Dictionary Supplement, I noticed that TASER is listed, along with the adjectival TASERED. But there's no confirmation of TASER as a verb.

What, you might ask, is the etymology of TASER? Both Chambers and the Oxford agree on the same derivation, the fictitious Tom Swift's electric rifle, modelled on 'laser'. However, the Barnhart dictionary comes up with a completely different etymology: Tele-Active Shock Electronic Repulsion, influenced by 'laser'. The only

point the three dictionaries agree on is the influence of 'laser'. Anyone care to confirm the accuracy of either of these etymologies, or toss in a third etymology?

Two final points. The latest block-busting Steven Spielberg film, "Jurassic Park", contains a scene where a group of armed guards are ordered to turn on their Tasers, because the caged velociraptors (raptors possessing great speed) are getting restless. Anyone care to establish whether VELOCIRAPTOR is a real word, or is it a nonce word for the film? I couldn't find it in any of my dictionaries.

WHISTLIN' DIXIE

This book, published by Facts on File for \$24.95 in 1993 (also available from Barnes & Noble for \$17.98 plus \$3.50 shipping), is the first of a proposed series of regional slang dictionaries. Robert Hendrickson has assembled more than 3500 words or phrases with brief definitions and sources (if known) relating to the South: callyhooting, beauticious, hoiked, jularker, hissy, sigogglin, catawampus, spizzerinctum. The similes are especially colorful:

*hopping like peas on a hot shovel
frisky as a flea on a flat dog
mad as a pig on ice with his tail froze in
moves like dead lice are falling off him*

The humorous exaggerations are equally memorable:

*even his in-growed toenails is on the outside of his shoes
charge it to the dust and let the rain settle it*

Southern peculiarities of pronunciation are occasionally repeated: Mimphis, reeceet [recipe], sich, 'Bammy [Alabama], N'Yawlins.

My one quibble is that the author sometimes includes words which occur in only one instance (albeit a Southern one): expressions used by a single author (catastastroke from Calder Willingham or unbalm from Faulkner), a TV show ("kiss my grits" from Alice), or a movie ("Closed For Flu", a store-window sign in My Cousin Vinnie).